Beauty queen beheaded

by ROBERT DE ANDREIS

I had one night last week that was so bad, I woke up every half hour and coughed until my eyes watered. As I learn to make new adjustments with my body, things are slowly becoming more bearable, although I'm sure I kept my neighbors up all night.

Something happened in the middle of that difficult night, something that overpowered me and made me cry, and those tears cleansed the toxic fluids from my body for the moment. I awoke from a dream, and although I firmly believe that no one over five years old should ever discuss personal dreams with a registered dream/repressed memory counselor/channeling surfer/former Catholic priest/inner childlike massage therapist, I will share this one with you because it helped me realize something about the nature of my whole AIDS experience.

It was so simple. I was lying in bed and he was in bed with me, on his side, looking at me in a protective, concerned way. I haven't had a man in my bed for over a year, a fact I never could have imagined before I got sick. It had been so much a part of my life that I had taken it for granted, never imagining it could end so coldly. All my adult life there have been a few warm bodies, but these days there is nothing but silence.

In the dream he held my hand. It was such a simple pleasure, but a sensation I had completely forgotten about. I asked him who he was and he said, "I am your reader." It was that damn stalker again!

In case you hadn't noticed, I have demonstrated how "AIDS and the Single Girl" works. Yes, I have been single this whole time, living alone and loving it. If I was coughing all night or running to the toilet all the time, eventually it would drive a partner crazy and I couldn't hack up pieces of lung in peace without worrying — big co that I am — how I could stuff a sock in it so he could get a good night's sleep. Listen to your tired Uncle Robert: Being single and living alone has some major advantages. So stop trying to drag that last-minute boyfriend material off the street, as you lig about your status through those thrush-coated teeth of yours.

Recently I've been going through personal papers and letters, the only items in my estate of any value. There were beautiful love letters from men I don't even remember, telling me how much they think of me. I imagine some of those men have no idea what became of me and how sick I've become. I imagine some of those hopelessly romantic souls still carry around a younger image of my former handsome self, immortalized in memory, and would be horrified at the current sight. But even the best beauty queens are beheaded by time.

I enjoyed my looks when I had them, but I certainly wasn't neurotic about them. I was never one of those queens who couldn't leave the house without doing a deep sea mud mask facial, alpha hydroxy puff-reducing eye creams and those spritz-on mini face-lifts they sell in the vending machines at the Glass Coffin, uh, I mean, Twin Peaks.

But these days it's different. Over the years I seem to have inherited quite a collection of odds and ends in the makeup department, mostly handfuls of Clinique products from Pepe, who gave them to me when he was on his deathbed — he was quite a kleptomaniac. It's no secret that many of us later-stage girls dab a little on for color. We have to. Otherwise we can be picked up, thrown into the morgue and cited for impersonating a corpse.

I never had those "A-gay" totally chiseled, boring white boy looks anyway. I was always more "Queen of the B's." I never had pictures of myself in my home — I was more casual about the whole thing. Ugly people just assume that if you're attractive it's some big central focus of your life. But the truth is, beauty offers the same hierarchy, rejection and insecurities that we all face. In fact, some of my former friends are butt ugly with butt-ugly butts to match. They were always much better at finding dates than me, mostly because they knew how to work that SPCA.

Columnist Robert De Andreis

Some days I don't even bother to cover up the KS on my face — I've lost all traces of vanity. You think you're going to fall apart when your face gets messed up, but you don't. You survive, you get over it.

I had my day in the sun, and now I'm covered with skin cancer. But so what? If the KS doesn't get you, one day those wrinkles will. Or maybe you think you're going to get face-lifts all your life and end up looking like stretch pants with lips. I'm repelled by those nip-and-tuck, doll-head, Palm Springs White Party messes made by Mattel, plastic pecs and all. Besides, character is always more attractive than perfection. You're going to lose that pretty face of yours one way or another. You think you'll be flawless forever? With that attitude, they'll mistakenly exhume your coffin in 20 years, with the national news looking on, and the whole world will see how beautiful you really are, Blanche.

Excuse me for going off; it's the medication, you understand. Dear readers, kindly drop me a line as soon as you feel I'm dementing before your eyes. It's always so hard to be objective, especially when a whole gaggle of tumors is probably setting up house in my head. I'll just take your word on it, and pass on that brain biopsy because the sound of that drilling in my skull makes my skin crawl — or maybe that's something my dermatologist needs to look at. Despite the suggestion of my oncologist, I'm so glad I decided against chemotherapy for my pulmonary KS. Baloney, you say? Besides making lunch meat out of my lungs, I recently read in Kaiser's HIV newsletter a little known fact: the only reason that there are nails in coffins is to keep the oncologists out.

Robert De Andreis gives a free reading and talk 1 p.m. June 3 at Metropolitan Community Church (150 Eureka St.).

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